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ABSTRACT

The generation of questions of worthwhileness of academic advisement into researchable hypotheses is dependent upon results from outcome questions substantiating process questions. Researchable hypotheses are few due to the complexity of the advising process involving students, advisors, problems, methods, and researchers. Questions generated for research on academic advising are multidimensional and take the form of: Do the various modes of academic advisement yield differential effects with different kinds of students, advisors, and problems? How? When? With the complexity of researchable questions of academic advising the resulting methodological variance requires the application of multivariate factoral analysis designs. (Author)

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A META-PRESENTATION

OF

A THEORETICAL AND RESEARCH BASE FOR ACADEMIC ADVISEMENT

by

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INTRODUCTION

It is customary for researchers and developers to preface their presentations by calling attention to the primitiveness of their fields. This practice happens so frequently that it has become suspect. Certainly when this assertion is made in the field of advisement you may entertain the possibility of a defense mechanism in operation. The purpose of this presentation is not to discuss the most recent literature or the primitiveness of research and theory in the field of academic advisement, rather it is to take the position that there is a dire necessity for a research and theoretical base for academic advisement.

Academic advising within institutions of higher education has been the target of criticism from faculty as well as students with charges of inadequacy, dehumanization, routinization, and extension of _in loco parentis_. Typically faculty understand their roles as advisers to be extracurricular rather than a function integral to education. Students feel reluctant and apologetic to use faculty time for advising except for the administratively required signatures. Atypically research studies at Princeton, Stanford, Swarthmore, and the University of Arizona have shown that the use of advising services for programs of studies has been related to students' personal developmental needs (Stanford, 1969).

Faculty and student's experience of academic advisement is further complicated with the impact of rapid technological change in education. With the shift in values from a teaching society toward a learning society (Wilson, 1970), with the expanding age range of students and of continuing education programs, with special programs for minority groups, lower

middle-class whites, and women, and with modular and 'home delivery' systems through television and cassette tapes, questions are necessarily being posed concerning emergent forms of academic advisement. With the award of 80 external degrees this past academic year from the State University of New York to students having never attended college (Nolan, 1972) the demands for new forms of academic advisement are increasing and there is no evidence that these demands will lessen in the future.

Under such conditions the development of academic advisement programs has taken precedence over systematic research. The field is heavily populated by practitioners who are compelled to respond to these conditions. Most have little opportunity to conduct research and few have little concern about theory.

Theory and Academic Advisement

Establishment of a theoretical base for academic advisement provides the researcher and practitioner with a parsimonious summary of both reported and anticipated results of research. Theorizing in the field of academic advisement yields higher-order generalizations of individual and organizational behavior in the academic setting. The caution in the process of simplification of the real world of academic advisement is not to oversimplify. A sound theoretical system will present constructs and propositions analogous to the phenomena indicating the relationship among variables in a manner that can be mathematically described.

Research and publications about academic advisement have not revealed explicit theoretical bases (Dayton, 1970). Critiques of educational research suggest that researchers have, indeed, made strong

efforts to avoid the use of theoretical systems (Smedsland, 1964). Upon examination of recent literature the rationales for this absence of a theoretical base in educational research have varied from mistrust of theory to opposing philosophies of educational science. For some researchers this absence may indicate they have concluded that historical and contemporary psychological and educational theory is unsuitable for the area of academic advisement. For other researchers this absence may be due to an atheoretical position. Describing his atheoretical research Skinner has written:

> I never attacked a problem by constructing a hypothesis. I never deduced theorems or submitted them to experimental checks. So far as I can see, I had no preconceived model of behavior -- certainly not a physiological or mentalistic one, and I believe not a conceptual one. (Skinner, 1959)

For still other researchers it is evident that they have thought about neither the development and use of a theoretical base nor the rejection of one. In most cases the absence of a theoretical base has not been the result of a well thought out position, rather it has been the result of the researcher presenting findings without explicitly stating the theory.

Research and Academic Advisement

Research in the area of academic advisement generally involves collecting and interpreting data within the parameters of the scientific study of students being advised. The researcher's inquiry into academic advisement is a description or conclusion-oriented inquiry involving the formulation of problems and reporting findings of the inquiry so that others may make sound developments. Research on academic advisement is neither more special nor plagued with unusual problems than other

psychological and educational research. Certainly research in academic advisement has particular problems with control groups, tenuous control of some variables, and process variables. However, for complex problems there are complex research methodologies. Our contemporary levels of knowledge and understanding in the field of academic advisement can be furthered with sound principles of research design and appropriate inferences from research findings.

Using theory to make sense out of the substance and function of academic advisement the researcher asks questions as to what academic advisement is; the inquiry is description or conclusion-oriented. Questions as to what should be done in academic advisement are the domain of the educational developer, an inquirer who is prescription or decision oriented. Some persons are competent in both the roles of researcher and developer. The inquiry into academic advisement generates varied and complex questions: What remains to be investigated about academic advisement? Under what conditions will other variables contribute to academic advisement outcome? Do various techniques produce differential effects with different students and situations? Are there underlying variables common to any academic advisement process? Krumboltz (1965) has described the complexity of the number of variables involved in this type of research, and if paraphrased for academic advisement the question might read:

> For students desiring help on each type of academic advisement problem of concern to the adviser, what techniques and procedures, when used by what kind of advisers, with which type of students, for how long, and in what sequence, will produce which types of effects?

Translating questions of academic advisement into researchable hypotheses is an arduous task. It is the task of the researcher to formulate these questions into problems to be solved and conclusions from that research are then made accessible to the persons in the area of development in academic advisement.

The difficulty in generating researchable hypotheses, in specifying conceptualizing variables, and in utilizing or developing appropriate measuring instruments has been due to the complexity of the advising process involving students, advisors, problems, methods, and researchers. Theory of academic advisement functions to determine which variables will be included in a study. Of the types of questions used in this area of research process questions are only useful if results from outcome questions can substantiate a process question. Although outcome studies are more prevalent they have generally been less successful then process studies in yielding results that can be generalized.

Research Design in Academic Advisement

In addition to the primary tasks of theory construction and conceptual analysis are the verification elements of research design, statistical compilations, and inferential statements. Some of the recent literature indicates that a theoretical basis for research in academic advisement has been abandoned due both to the difficulty in designing experimental research and the degree of control involving the prefabrication of unrealistic environments for academic advisement studies. Both rationales are specious arguments since theory building is done at philosophical and practical levels as well as in experimental

research, and since there is a wealth of statistical techniques for determining the generalizability and validity of inferences from experimental research. Indeed, studies of academic advisement can be designed to control and manipulate the variables in the natural settings of advising.

Academic advisement is a multidimensional phenomena in which a decision and adjustment in a particular situation as measured by one set of criteria does not lend itself easily to prediction of other decisions and adjustments in other situations or as measured by other criteria. It is known that measures from one source have higher intercorrelations than those from different sources. Given the multidimensional characteristics of academic advisement intercorrelations within different measures of the same aspect or variable will be higher than the correlations between other aspects or variables.

With the multidimensional characteristics and methodological variance involved in this type of research multivariate factoral analysis designs are frequently most appropriate. The use of specific factor analytic methods is dependent upon the assumptions that can be made from the data and the decisions that the researcher is able to make with the complexity of the questions.

Relationship of Research to Development and Practice

The function of the researcher is to formulate descriptions and explanations of academic advisement, of its process and outcome. To know what sound theory is in the area of academic advisement enables

the researcher to theorize about academic advisement. Psychological theory, educational theory, sociological theory, or theories of academic advisement are inadequate in themselves for effective academic advisement. The gap between theory and actual advising requires the formulation of policies and programs based upon the studies of sound research.

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